

Who should get influenza vaccine during the 2004-2005 season?

- **Adults aged 65 or over**
- **Children aged 6–23 months**

Children younger than 2 years old have one of the highest rates of hospitalization due to influenza.

- **Persons aged 2-64 years with underlying chronic medical conditions**

These include heart or lung disease, diabetes, kidney disease, asthma, cancer, HIV/AIDS, and blood disorders.

- **Women who will be pregnant during influenza season**
- **Residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities**
- **Health care workers with direct patient care**
- **Children and teenagers, 6 months-18 years of age on chronic aspirin therapy**

They are at risk for developing Reye syndrome after influenza.

- **Out-of-home caregivers and household contacts of children less than 6 months old**

People not in these groups should forego the influenza vaccine this season.

Talk with your health care provider before you get an influenza vaccine if you:

- Have a fever or an active infection.
- Have ever had a severe reaction to eggs or to a prior dose of vaccine.
- Have a history of Guillain-Barré syndrome.

For more information, contact your physician,
local health department
or the

**Missouri Department of Health
and Senior Services
Section for Communicable Disease
Prevention
PO Box 570
Jefferson City, MO 65102
www.dhss.mo.gov
1-866/628-9891**



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Influenza (Flu)

Questions & Answers

2004-2005 Interim Guidelines

Frequently Asked Influenza (Flu) Questions

Q What is influenza?

A Influenza (often referred to as “the flu”) is a highly contagious illness of the body’s respiratory (breathing) system. It is caused by the influenza virus, which infects the inside of the nose, throat, and lungs.

Q What types of influenza are there?

- A**
- Type A is the most common and causes moderate to severe illness.
 - Type B causes milder illness and primarily affects children.

Q What are the symptoms?

- A**
- Sudden onset of fever (100°F-104°F) lasting 2-3 days, rarely more than 5 days
 - Headache
 - Chills
 - Extreme tiredness (especially in adults)
 - Dry cough
 - Sore throat
 - Runny or stuffy nose
 - Body and muscle aches

These symptoms can range from mild to very severe. Children may experience diarrhea, nausea, and vomiting, but adults generally do not.

Q How serious is influenza?

A Most people are sick for only a few days. Some people, however, may develop pneumonia or worsening of other conditions. Every year in the U.S., flu leads to an average of 200,000 hospitalizations and 36,000 deaths, making influenza and pneumonia combined the sixth-leading cause of death.

Influenza-related complications occur in all age groups. The elderly, young children, pregnant women, and people with chronic medical problems and weakened immune systems are at higher risk.

Q How is influenza spread?

A It is usually spread when infected people cough or sneeze into the air without covering their mouths.

Q How soon do symptoms appear?

A Influenza symptoms usually start 1-4 days after exposure.

Q How long can a person spread influenza?

A A person infected with influenza can spread the virus from 1 day before symptoms appear to 1 week after. Children may spread influenza for 10 days or longer.

Q How is influenza diagnosed?

A The diagnosis of influenza is usually based on the symptoms. Some physicians choose to do a test to confirm influenza. Results are most reliable when the test is done within three days after symptoms begin.

Q What is the treatment?

- A**
- Bed rest
 - Plenty of fluids
 - Non-aspirin pain relievers, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol™), or ibuprofen (Advil™ or Motrin™)

Talk to a health care provider or pharmacist with questions about over-the-counter medications. Children and teenagers with influenza should **never** take aspirin as they can develop a rare, but serious disease called Reye syndrome.

A person at high risk for complications should discuss use of antiviral medications with their health care provider.

Q How can I protect myself from getting influenza?

A Washing hands helps prevent influenza because it can be transmitted by direct hand-to-hand contact or by touching objects after an infected person has touched them and then touching your nose, eyes or mouth. The virus can live 8 hours or longer on surfaces.

Influenza vaccine can prevent influenza. There are now 2 types of influenza vaccine available – an injection (or shot) and a nasal spray.

Annual influenza vaccination is 70%-90% effective in preventing illness in healthy adults less than 65 years of age and up to 91% effective in preventing influenza in healthy children. Annual vaccination in the elderly is 30%- 40% effective in preventing influenza, 50%-60% effective

in preventing hospitalization or pneumonia, and up to 80% effective in preventing death.

Antiviral medications when started within 48 hours of illness onset may be used by persons who are unable to take the influenza vaccine. These drugs may cause side effects and are not appropriate for everyone. Use of these drugs requires a prescription and should be discussed with a health care provider prior to use.

Q When should I get influenza vaccine?

A Influenza vaccine is updated annually and provides protection for approximately one year. For those in high risk groups, the best time to get a vaccination is during October and November. It takes about 14 days for the vaccine to provide protection against influenza.

It is not too late to get the vaccine in December and throughout the influenza season since influenza season typically runs October through early May.

Q How safe is influenza vaccine?

A The influenza vaccine is safe and effective. **You cannot get influenza from the shot.** Injectable influenza vaccine is made from killed viruses.

Most people who receive an influenza injection have no problem with it. The most common reaction is soreness where the shot was given.

FluMist™, the nasal spray vaccine, is FDA approved only for healthy children and adults aged 5-49 years old.